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**Community Oriented Defender (COD)  
Statement of Principles**

**Introduction**

*Developed by the Brennan Center in consultation with members of the COD advisory group, this COD Statement of Principles identifies the goals of participants in the COD Network. We hope it will serve as a useful tool to inspire staff, educate the public, and build the capacity of the COD movement to make a difference for clients, families and communities.*

**Principles**

Members of the COD Network, recognizing that community oriented defense services may take many forms (reflecting local imperatives, unique office priorities, resource constraints, and other factors), embrace the following goals:

- 1. Create a “client-centered practice”** – We aspire to employ a diverse group of attorneys, investigators, social workers and other advocates who respect their clients’ wishes and goals, and who work together to ensure that the dignity of every client is honored.
- 2. Meet clients’ needs** – We seek to promote the life success of every client by: identifying educational gaps, mental health issues, addiction, and other needs, and linking clients with resources, opportunities, and services to meet those needs.
- 3. Partner with the community** – We seek to maintain a local presence in the communities we serve, and to form relationships with community members, community based organizations, and community institutions (e.g., courts, schools, government, health care providers and employers) to improve case outcomes and life outcomes for clients and to strengthen families and communities.
- 4. Fix systemic problems** – We aspire to change policies that harm clients, families and communities (e.g., policing practices that produce racial and ethnic disparities in arrest rates).
- 5. Educate the public** – We seek to describe the human impact of the criminal justice system to policymakers, journalists, and others so that the public can better appreciate the cost to individuals, communities, and the nation of “tough on crime” policies.

6. **Collaborate** – We aim to create partnerships with likely and unlikely allies, including prosecutors, victims, faith-based organizations, and national and state based legal aid organizations to share ideas, promote change, and support mutual efforts.
7. **Address civil legal needs** – We seek to promote access to civil legal services to resolve clients’ legal concerns in such areas as housing, immigration, family court, and public benefits, occasioned by involvement with the criminal justice system.
8. **Pursue a multidisciplinary approach** – We aspire to engage not only lawyers but also social workers, counselors, medical practitioners, investigators and others to address the needs of clients, their families and communities.
9. **Seek necessary support** – We seek essential funding, professionally approved workload limits, and other resources and structures sufficient to enable the COD model to succeed.
10. **Participate in the COD network** – We are dedicated to sharing ideas, research and models to help advance the COD movement locally and nationally in order to maximize its benefits for clients, families and communities.